

# ARTGAZE

townsville's arts magazine

summer 2009





## note from the editor

I am very excited to include fashion, jewellery and theatre in this issue of *Art Gaze*. I had the pleasure of attending *Henry V* in September and thoroughly enjoyed the outdoor atmosphere that Tropic Sun created.

I have completed my honours year at university and thank all of those who attended my exhibition at eMerge media space.

I would also like to thank the writers, designer and all those that assist in creating *Art Gaze* magazine. This issue brings *Art Gaze* into it's third year of publication and I look forward to the future of Townsville's arts magazine.

If you would like to be a part of *Art Gaze*, I am always seeking fresh ideas, so please contact me.

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*Art Gaze* gratefully acknowledges sponsorship from Boulton Cleary & Kern Lawyers.

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Front cover: Skirts by Mary Ede, Photographed by  
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*Electric Trams, George Street, David Jones corner, c. 1880-1923, Tyrell Photographic Collection, Powerhouse Museum*

## sebastian chan's digital social collection

**RAISE YOUR VOICE: Fourth National Public Galleries Summit 2009**

BY RENEE JOYCE

Anyone who regularly presents at industry or public events will tell you there are two key elements to a successful presentation: interesting information (and cutting-edge research, if feasible) and a dynamic and engaging presentation. Unfortunately, more often than not, they do not necessarily happen together.

When Sebastian Chan, Head of Digital, Social and Emerging Technologies at the Powerhouse Museum, presented at the Collections and Access plenary session of Museum and Gallery Services Queensland's Raise Your Voice: Fourth National Public Galleries Summit 2009, it was clear he had achieved the successful

formula. For those who were fortunate enough to attend, it was without question the most dynamic presentation of the Conference and was like a fresh breeze on the challenging topic of digitisation of collections and public access to digitised collections in Australian museums and galleries.

Chan's biography is impressive. In addition to the responsibility for creative direction and directive guidance of the Powerhouse Museum's online web presence, collection database and experimental and collaborative projects, Chan is a highly prolific researcher in social media, museums and technology. Chan is a committee member for a number of international organisations that address technology and its facilitation of community engagement with culture and cultural institutions, including Museums and the Web (USA), Digital Strategies for Heritage (EU), Horizon.Au New Media Consortium, Culturemondo, and is also involved with the Australian government's 2.0 Taskforce, which is investigating community access and engagement with public sector information. If that isn't impressive enough, Chan also has curatorial and directorial experience in international festivals and events, and runs an independent music magazine, Cyclic Defrost.

A biography, however, is not required to see how successful Chan has been. Under his direction the Powerhouse Museum has become one of the most innovative Australian institutions by actively engaging with the community through the digital world. Chan's plenary session presentation, *The (Digital) Social Collection*, encompassed a snapshot of the techniques that the Powerhouse Museum has and continues to use to engage with communities through digital media and digital social networks. One of the most exciting of these was the Museum's historical photographic collection – the Tyrell Collection – on the photographic digital community site Flickr. Flickr is a website and digital hub that works primarily within the framework of creative commons image licensing and access requirements. Through the use of Flickr, the Powerhouse Museum was able to expand its online audience from 31,000 website hits in the 12 months of 2007 to over 900,000 in the 12 months after the collection was integrated into Flickr, for the cost of \$25 per year.

As current industry leaders in community engagement with collections through digital media, the Powerhouse Museum also asked people to not simply view the Tyrell Collection once loaded onto Flickr but also to engage with it. Chan and his team created the Tyrell Today Group, which asked Flickr members to photograph contemporary views of the locations depicted in the historic photographs. As Chan cleverly noted in his presentation, the Powerhouse Museum's use of Flickr and creation of the Tyrell Today Group is about 'putting collection where the community is' and 'encouraging the right behaviour'. The innovative team at the Powerhouse Museum has also expanded upon this digital network to create outcomes outside the digital environment, including: a book that showcases the historical photograph collection juxtaposed with the comments of Flickr community members; and a number of physical public events that build upon the audience engagement with the digital images.

Sebastian Chan and the Powerhouse Museum are not reinventing the proverbial wheel with their engagement with digital communities; these digital communities exist happily within the web, connecting innumerable people across the world, a majority of whom may never visit an art gallery or museum. What Chan and the Powerhouse Museum are doing is recognising the significant shift in the manner in which people access information and images and how they engage with other people. They are very cleverly capitalising upon this. Online communities such as Flickr, Facebook and Twitter, and digital frameworks such as Blogs and Wikis, are highly accessible

and relatively easy to use (even to the uninitiated), so why are the Powerhouse Museum and professionals like Chan shining beacons of light and not simply indicative of the norm? Perhaps this is a question that should be pondered by those in the industry. Is it trepidation, a lack of resources (fiscal, human and time), a lack of understanding or a combination of all three? If these are the reasons why regional, state and national galleries/museums are dragging their feet in terms of digital community engagement, then the solution is a relatively easy one. In an arts and cultural sector where audience numbers are more stringently reviewed than ever (and indicative of the success of a gallery or museum), it is a pertinent juncture for galleries and museums to educate themselves in the details of these digital networks and access points so as to shift the resources required to capitalise on the significant opportunities they offer. Perhaps it is time to follow the lead of Chan and the Powerhouse Museum: commit to the notion that the world cannot regress and hence choose to progress with it.

Sebastian Chan's Conference Presentation can be found at the Museum and Gallery Services Queensland Website [http://www.magsq.com.au/01\\_cms/details.asp?ID=465](http://www.magsq.com.au/01_cms/details.asp?ID=465). Chan also writes a blog that is worth checking out [www.powerhousemuseum.com/dmsblog/](http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/dmsblog/)



Kerry and co. Sydney, *Fern Trees, Mt Kembla*, c. 1884-1917, Tyrell Photographic Collection, Powerhouse Museum

## 21 years of watercolour

BY JACQUI STOCK

The Townsville Watercolour Group comes of age in 2009, celebrating 21 years of companionship and arts practice. It was formed in 1988 by two friends, Del Baldock and Alison Annersley, both of whom were members of the Townsville Art Society and who recognised a growing need for artists using specific media to be able to work and learn together, enabling them to support each other as they explored their chosen genre.

'It's what keeps us going,' Geoff Maidens, a spokesperson for the group, said.

Originally the group met under Baldock's house in Mundingburra, where proximity to the Ross River and Anderson Park led to many an outdoor excursion, giving members the opportunity to paint straight from nature.

Although these days it is more common for the artists to find themselves working in the studio using photographic references, it is not uncommon for group members to undertake extra courses, such as one recent trip to the Northern Territory with artist John Lovett.

These excursions would inevitably generate a lot of excitement in the group, with the other members looking forward to picking the brains of their associates on their return.

Membership was initially limited to eight or nine participants due to the space available in their chosen venue and this situation remained unchanged until Del Baldock's death in 2006, when the Townsville Watercolour Group moved to its current meeting place in rooms dedicated to Del at the Townsville Art Society's premises at 206 Kings Road, Pimlico, where expansion to about 14 members became



Pat Nelson, *Boabs and anthills*, watercolour and ink, photographed by Jacqui Stock

possible, although due to the group's popularity there is still a waiting list of people interested in joining.

The group meets on Wednesday mornings from 9 am until noon and charges only \$4 per session to cover expenses.

Their first exhibition, then titled *Art in the Garden*, was held in the Perfume Gardens adjacent to the old Magistrates Court in Sturt Street and was part of the Fifth Pacific Festival of Arts in Townsville, an event aimed at bringing together aspects of the arts from countries across the Pacific.

'Members slept out overnight with the works to protect them,' Maidens said.

Due to these security issues, the following year it was decided to show the group's work in Baldock's own well-shaded garden and the annual *Under the Mango Tree* exhibition was born, remaining at that location until Del's passing, when the exhibition once again shifted to a new location at current member Marion O'Shea's Mosart Gallery under yet





Eddie Omelaniuk, *Coast Guard*, watercolour, Photographed by Jacqui Stock

another mango tree. This exhibition is still a popular source of quality artworks at bargain basement prices due to the works being offered matted but unframed.

Venues change and people change but the essence of the group has remained with no grand plans to alter the original concept.

'Why should we when it works so well,' Pat Nelson, one of the group's early members, said.

The group has been included in many other exhibitions over time, with members showing at such places as The Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, with Ordinary, Extraordinary Seniors, which was produced in collaboration with the Townsville Committee for the Aging, and The Victoria Park Hotel where works concerned with the history of South Townsville were shown.

The resulting sales from these two shows alone placed quite a few of the group's works into both corporate and private collections locally and further afield. This has also been the case at shows held in Art on Kings, the Townsville Art Society's own gallery, and from the annual miniature exhibition also held at The Perc Tucker Regional Gallery.

The works produced by the group show their interest in the local region, with land and seascapes, floral art and architectural imagery abounding.

This year's exhibition was no disappointment with a variety of works to choose from. Founding member Pat Nelson's *Boabs and Anthills*

shows how effective combining watercolour with pen and ink can be, as does Ruth Bank's *Summer Homestead*.

For those preferring more traditional approaches to watercolour, Geoff Maidens' *Reflections* highlights the delights of our local river environments, as does Eddie Omelaniuk's beautifully drafted piece *Coast Guard – Ross Creek*.

Long-term member and well-known local artist Val Claussen concentrated on our award-winning family favourite, The Strand, in her piece *Strand Leisure*, while Norma Twyne looked at other aspects of the marine environment in *Breaking Wave* and Donna Maloney on a well-known inhabitant of the reef in *Little Clown*.

Marion O'Shea celebrated the beauty of the tropical *Heliconia* bloom in her work *Exotica 6* and Jan Whebell used the time-honoured compositional technique of still life in her floral piece *Pot of Gerberas*.

Describing themselves as 'an informal group of people enjoying themselves', the Townsville Watercolour Group has come a long way from its humble beginnings under Del Baldock's house in Mundingburra, reaching its 21st year with as much enthusiasm as it began with in 1988, the companionship of the like-minded keeping them on track in what has proved to be a very good thing indeed.

# parred down

## judith bohm-parr

BY DR STEPHEN NAYLOR

Umbrella Studio main space exhibition  
9 October–15 November 2009

Judith Bohm-Parr studied at the Canberra School of Art, where she attained a Bachelor of Arts in Visual Arts. She subsequently completed her Master of Arts in Creative Arts at James Cook University, where I met Judith four years ago. Her work traverses the medium of glass and found objects within the genre of jewellery. Judith presents many challenges to her audience; it is not simply an exploration of colour, nature, materials, art, craft or jewellery. Her practice employs the skills of a jeweller but her work is measured by the intuition of an artist. Judith's thesis, which researched the iconography of colour, focused on the use of glass with an investigation into the 'neck' as a site of display. She has traced the history of neck adornment and its association within the discipline of jewellery through the ages. However, somewhere along the way her research discovered a number of subsidiary questions; the site of the neck became a starting point that ended up in this exhibition *Parred Down* with an array of jewellery, glass and found objects presented in an installation context.

The hierarchy of jewellery within the decorative arts became uncomfortable as a site for her practice, the associated baggage of the jeweller became 'a grain of sand in the oyster flesh, the discomfort became an itch and resulted in a scratch—one that saw the exposure of the preciousness of the jewellery genre'. Glass, by its commonality, was seen as a non-precious material, yet with all of its chameleon qualities and allure it could represent the valuable gemstones that are recognised by translucence, lustre and a vast array of magnificent colours. But the *povera* of glass in comparison with authentic stones opened up possibilities of sharing the work with a larger audience. This deference to the elitist mediums of the jewellery genre, in favour of glass and beads, revealed many more opportunities to explore creative practice.

As a glass artist Judith understood the malleability of glass, not its perceived hard cold rigidity but rather its warm organic qualities as revealed by the medium under heat. The ooze of flowing molten glass, so captured with the *pate de verre* technique, is presented as a 'precious medium' in flux, one that opens up possibilities for design and the playfulness of art making.

Along the research road Judith has also found sanctuary in her 'weekender' up on the Tablelands. Here a sense of 'place' invaded her research project, challenging her initial concept of the production of neck adornments with a suite of new possibilities. She became preoccupied with land, flora, trees, ghost gums, droplets of dew clinging to juvenile leaves and phosphorescent colours. In her environment the jeweller and glass artist melded and realised her rightful medium – dichroic glass. A new body of works emerged in the form of 'Botanicals', but the question now emerged – how to draw this disparate project together? The answer came through her engagement with place: the detritus of the past mining settlement and the utilitarian objects: a spring, a drawer, a cupboard, a drill core, a brick, a bucket and a frame. All of these oneiric objects provided Judith with a stage to choreograph her work in an ambitious exhibition and a way of drawing together this artistic and scholarly journey. The exhibition *Parred Down* was the result of a six year journey, one I know Judith was delighted to be finished, but one I was glad to be part of in the final stages.

The power of undertaking a research project in the creative arts is that you go into the research as someone who wishes to engage with practice and theory for an extended period of time, but come out the other side a different person. It is a journey that challenges all candidates and pushes them into places they may not have gone if they had continued to work purely as an artist. It is important when we see the final exhibitions of Masters and PhD candidates that the audience recognises that these researchers have also produced a significant study in the form of a thesis or exegesis, which interrogates the big issues that arise from their practice-based research.

Creative arts researchers grow during their candidature developing a scholarly approach that adds to their artistic practice, not always in the work they produce but certainly in the way they think about the art they create.

# the secret treasure—

## my dream of pearls

BY JO MORRIS-ROSS

*Jo Morris-Ross is a Townsville-based artist combining her creative passion with her love of pearls to design and produce individual pieces of jewellery. In discussing pearls and art with Jo, her excitement and enthusiasm is inspirational. Jo's childhood dream of finding pearl treasure came true in her adult years.*

As a child in my rainy, suburban London bedroom, I would read pirate stories and dream of distant—and sunny—tropical islands. How wonderful it would be to dive in warm, crystal clear waters, to perhaps find an oyster and discover my very own black pearl for my private treasure chest. Such are a child's fantasies. As I grew older, and with a love of all things sparkly, I started to acquire some lovely pieces of jewellery. While there were black pearls for sale in the Central London jewellery stores, they had extortionate prices, so it remained an elusive dream for me to own one.

Over the next few years my mother started to make her own jewellery as a hobby. She became rather proficient and would often sell pieces of her own work. I attended art school, where I gained a Diploma in General Art and Design. I worked with many forms of art, including pottery, three-dimensional design and model-making. It was lovely to work with different media and it opened my eyes as to what my hands were able to create.

I went on to specialise in graphic design as I loved letter forms and, after a further two years of study, gained a Higher Diploma. Sometime over this period, my childhood dream of the South Seas crystallised into a dream of Tahiti – possibly related to the re-make of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, filmed on one of the islands. I had rediscovered the crystal clear waters of my childhood fantasies and I vowed I would go to Tahiti one day.

My dream came true in 2005, finally visiting the five islands of Tahiti, including two in the Tuomotu Archipelago. This is where the majority of South Sea black pearls are now farmed. The waters of the still lagoons contain strings of *Pinctada margaritifera* oysters, commonly known as the black-lip oyster, the only species in the world that produces a naturally dark pearl.

I also experienced my dream of diving in those warm waters. During a visit to a pearl farm, I was able to snorkel the oyster strings and pick an oyster and keep the black pearl, which I have worn ever since as a reminder of a dream that came true. There are many, many black pearls in Tahiti and I found them to be much more affordable. I was in heaven. I could buy more of these lovely natural jewels and a love affair was born.

I had never been a 'pearl' person until I met the Tahitian pearls. Not just black in colour, but shimmering with all the colours of the rainbow on a dark background—red, blue, gold and green—with pearl colours ranging from dark grey to light golden or grey-cream. I found them fascinating and desirable.

My friendship with a Tahitian family drew me back to the islands, where I spent some time with a French jeweller, learning how to drill and set them. Then I brought my first collection of Tahitian black pearls back to

Australia, where I now live in Townsville, with my Australian husband. During my visit, I was given the name Manutea, meaning 'White bird, who flies a long way from home', perfect for this London girl living in Australia.

When I returned to Australia, I started making jewellery using the pearls, using the basic skills that the jeweller had shown me, but before too long I wanted to be more creative with my designs.

As each pearl is grown by a separate animal, each pearl is unique. Not many of them are naturally round in shape. In fact, only one in 40 Tahitian pearls is round; the rest are teardrop shaped or baroque. This explains why strands of round sea pearls can cost thousands of dollars. To find 40 pearls of the same size, colour, shape and quality to make a strand, you may need to search thousands of pearls.

The perfect round pearl may be most desirable to a pearl connoisseur; however, my interest is held in the differences between each pearl. Obscure pearls demand a setting entirely of their own.

I am still building a treasure chest but this time it is full of beautiful things to use in my jewellery design alongside the black pearls. I only use real materials, from coral to diamonds. My jewellery skills are improving all the time, recently learning lost-wax casting. I am sure this will open many new creative doors for me as I can now make those special settings and hand-cast them in sterling silver. It gives me the greatest thrill to know that something I have created has given another person so much happiness.

To view my work, visit Manuteapearls at [www.Oztion.com.au](http://www.Oztion.com.au) or [www.manuteapearls.com](http://www.manuteapearls.com).



Courtesy of the artist





Jo Lankester, collograph, Courtesy of the Garage Press

## the garage press

The public now has an opportunity to view and purchase the works of several established and emerging local printmakers at The Garage Press. At the launch of the studio on 31 October, artworks included an impressive and varied collection of prints, for example, collographs and etchings of Jo Lankester, relief prints of Doug Arana, airbrushed portraits of John Bradshaw and experimental works on paper of Kyana Pike and Simon Reid. Ten artists were involved and all will participate in collaborative projects from time to time at the press which will be open on the first Saturday of each month and by appointment. Works consigned to The Press will also be exhibited online at [www.garagepress.com.au](http://www.garagepress.com.au).

The Garage Press  
16 Victor Street  
Cranbrook 4814

For more information contact Donna Foley on 0422416632.



Doug Arana, 4 Elements, Courtesy of Garage Press





Clothing by Katelyn Aslett, Photograph courtesy of the artist





Skirts by Mary Ede, Photographed by Chrissy Maguire

## la mode de'ville

BY HEATHER HAWKINS

*La mode de'ville. It makes 'The Fashion of Townsville' sound so very glamorous. So why do so many of us turn up our noses at the thought of shopping locally? As stylist Heather Hawkins explains, you don't have to jump on a plane to get kitted out in style.*

As a fashion stylist in Sydney, I thought I would have my work cut out for me when I moved to Townsville. But within the first few weeks I had nabbed two designer bargains: a Paul and Joe dress for \$200 and a Collette Dinnigan skirt for \$50. Outrageous! Things were looking up. I admit, yes we are faced with a few difficult factors in Townsville when putting together our wardrobes, namely the climate, the lifestyle and the distance from the fashion houses and department stores of the big cities. But I'm here to tell you to get that credit card out and dust it off, because Townsville is a hidden gem when it comes to buying clothes and finding bargains. There are many fabulous fashion stores around town offering great labels. Miss Ruby, Avanti and The Sale Shop are front of mind for fabulous one-off pieces. Jaxx and Stella Moda will keep you on trend and well-heeled. And you'll find great jeans, shirts and boots at Donahues. Don't forget your chain stores like Cue and Sportsgirl, offering great trend pieces. And never rule out stores like Target, Jeans West, or Sussan ... this is where we find our 'cheap but chic' items. Remember, we are 'recessionistas' now – fashionistas in a recession. It is our challenge, nay duty, to use a bit more muscle to search for those fab pieces, and staple pieces. And if all else fails, Internet shopping has never been better.

And when the shops start to bore you, please don't yawn. Go and see Mary Ede and Katelyn Aslett. Do not pass go. Do not collect \$200. These two Townsville-based designers are fabulous and their clothing is just

divine. Mary Ede, with a background in theatre and costume, is behind 'Mary Ede – The Skirt'. Her design house and showroom is located adjacent to her house in Hermit Park. Her skirts are one-off pieces, with fabric personally sourced from around the world, and silks hand-painted, making each skirt truly unique. If you're looking for a statement skirt, look no further than Mary Ede.

Or for something equally as special, mosey on down to see Katelyn Aslett in her gorgeous townhouse studio just off Denham Street in the city. Katelyn is a felt artist and fashion designer, and her work really must be seen to be believed. Working with Australian wool and silks, Katelyn creates amazing one-off dresses, cardigans, throws, skirts and more. Her latest collection was showcased at Brisbane Fashion Week last month and was very well received. Her work is light and textural, flowers being a theme throughout her collections. And with every piece, you can wear it so many different ways.

With such wonderful designers in Townsville, the city is really starting to stand up and take notice, and get behind the fashion in the area. The fashions of Townsville are being showcased like never before. Things that spring to mind are: Fashions on the Field and fashion parades at the various race days; Fashion Bash, an initiative to promote fashion and modelling among youth; and the Townsville Fashion Festival, coming up in April next year. And there are so many new festival events to put on the calendar: City of Townsville Design Awards; Townsville Retail Fashion Awards; and Fashion Ambassador Awards. It seems that fashion is more front of mind now than it has ever been. 'Anything promoting fashion is a good thing', I say. *They* say: 'any publicity is good publicity'. So it's a win-win situation.

We may not be right on trend, but that's not what we're about. The trends filter through in our own way – we adapt to suit our climate and our lifestyle. We don't need Balmain's peak shoulder jacket or Stella McCartney's thigh-high boots, but we know how to translate Louis Vuitton's tribal accessories and Missoni's kaftans to our wardrobes.

Why not team a one-off Mary Ede skirt with a basic tee and gladiator heels from Target? Instantly you've offset a 'big item' purchase with a 'cheap but chic' purchase. (If only one would cancel out the other on your credit card bill!) Or you could take that plain black business suit, add some statement jewellery from Diva and a sequined tank from Sportsgirl and, *voila*, you've gone from day to night on a budget.

Fashion makes Townsville a more interesting place. When people are not afraid of dressing on trend, or dressing as an individual, it makes 'people watching' from your favourite coffee spot so much more interesting! But light-heartedness aside, a thriving fashion industry in Townsville goes a long way to building the culture of this great city we live in. It adds much to the look and feel of the place. So be a part of it, I say. Go shopping this weekend ... for the good of your city!

#### CONTACT:

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Clothing by Katelyn Aslett, Photograph courtesy of the artist



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## if i could forget... but if i couldn't remember

### jak henson

BY JACQUI STOCK

14 September until 18 September 2009  
EMERGE MEDIA SPACE

What would we say if we were to examine ourselves as others saw us? This was just one focal point in Jak Henson's honours exhibition.

On entering the venue the viewer is faced with three large projections. The two side walls contain video interviews of specific subjects, with two smaller television screens opposite presenting the interviewees responding to the projections, which is accessed through headsets by the viewer.

Disembodied voices float eerily throughout the room, on-screen lips moving out of synch with the voices heard – whispered comments interspersed with clearly defined statements, designed to intrigue, spill from speakers set around the gallery.

The third screen directly opposite the entrance contains ghostly images of people going about their daily business, memories of reality gone from actual time, yet still existing.

The exhibition explores facets of portraiture, taking the idea of capturing artistically a true image of the subject to a new level. Henson has made every effort to avoid presumption in her portrayals.

By introducing the subjects to the edited version of their interview and then further taping their responses, the artist is creating the opportunity for the viewer for more insight into the subjects than one portrayal would have provided. The resulting responses give a more rounded view of each subject's personality, an ability which was not available to artists or viewers before the advent of current technologies, and which allows the inclusion of memory as an element in portraiture.

The viewer takes in far more than was previously offered – not only do we see the laugh lines etched into the face of Lister Bainbridge but we experience, through his memories, the enjoyment that created them; not only do we see the reflection of pain on Jason Hopkins' face but we are able to experience the cause through his comments and facial expressions.

Watching them watching themselves enables further enlightenment, almost like seeing fractals for the first time; the experience goes on and on.

This idea of capturing memory and bringing it forth, extending the view of who we are, takes the possibilities of artistic portrayal into another dimension where time is no longer a barrier.

The concept is further compounded by the inclusion of the seeming double exposure imagery contained on the third screen, highlighting the idea that although our experiences may be gone, our memory connects it to us for as long as that memory exists.



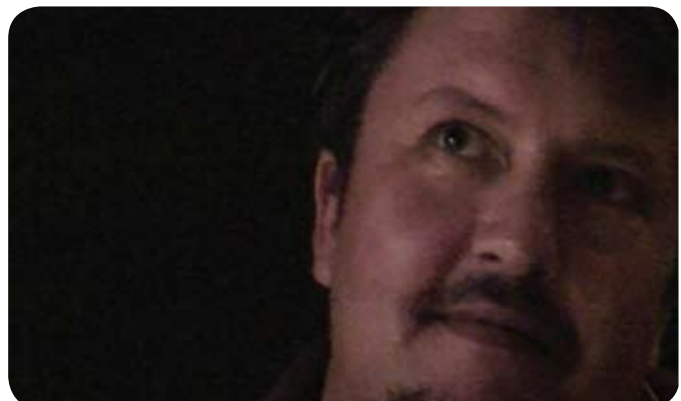
Jak Henson, *Passers-by*, 2009, Video Still, Courtesy of the artist



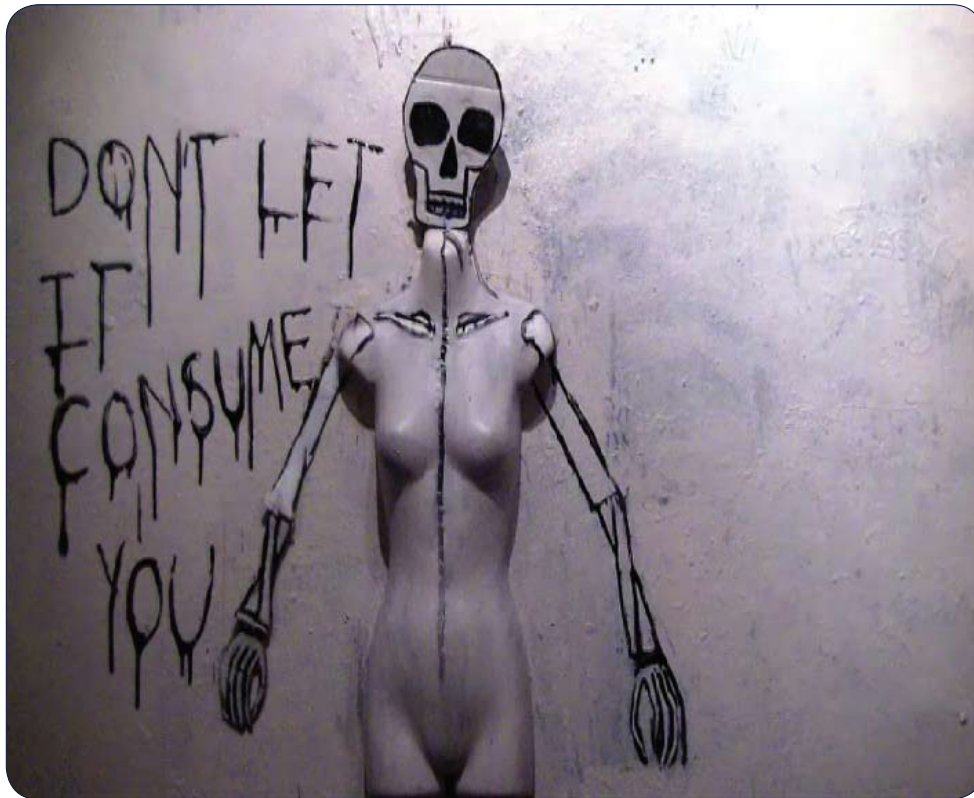
Jak Henson, *Lister Bainbridge*, 2009, Video Still, Courtesy of the artist



Jak Henson, *Jason Hopkins*, 2009, Video Still, Courtesy of the artist



Jak Henson, *Jason's response*, 2009, Video Still, Courtesy of the artist



Erica Reynolds, *Show your bones*, 2009, Video Still, Courtesy of eMerge Media Space

## northern lights short film festival

BY BERNADETTE ASHLEY

6 November 2009  
EMERGE MEDIA SPACE

Following up its successful inaugural new media award and exhibition, *ScreenGrab*, the School of Creative Arts (SoCA) at James Cook University has instituted an annual short film festival, aptly titled *Northern Lights*.

Where *ScreenGrab* drew entries from all over the world, *Northern Lights* is deliberately aimed at providing a platform for aspiring filmmakers from the immediate region.

The screening and judging at SoCA on November 6 was divided into two categories, high school and open, which had eight and four entries respectively, ranging from one to eight minutes in length.

The high school entries displayed diversity, a lot of imagination, resourcefulness on low budgets and reliance on family and mates for actors, extras and tech back-up. Most were conceptually solid, with ideas springing from the lives and experiences of the young filmmakers; so while some were a little naïve, they were also honest and relatively

unpretentious. Often set in the filmmakers' immediate environments, many were imbued with a distinctly north Queensland feel.

JCU literature and film lecturer, Dr Allison Craven, and Umbrella Studio's Aaron Ashley adjudicated, awarding Erica Reynolds (Pimlico State High) with first prize for her stop-motion film *Show Your Bones*. Around 4,000 stills were shot to create this beautiful three minute meditation on body image and acceptance, set to an atmospheric piano piece *Falling Leaves* from the French film *Amélie*. A shop display torso is painted with successive layers of bones and innards, continually stripped back and reworked to create a narrative about a young woman's inner workings on both a physical and emotional level. Without being directly derivative, *Show Your Bones* references *Amélie* not just musically, but also in its filmic devices for tweaking perception of time and for graphically depicting inner emotional states. Reynolds piece is an original and creative take which also showcases her artistic talent.

Rebecca Rymer (William Ross SHS) was awarded second in the high school entries for a darkly hilarious music video set to French singer Soko's *I'll Kill Her*. The un-pc song says everything society constrains us not to say after romantic rejection for another, and Rymer plays it to the max, putting a Barbie doll through interrogation under torchlight in a darkened room, water torture, poisoning, finally setting her on fire. The protagonist ends up on a psychiatrist's couch, leaving us wondering if it was all just a revenge fantasy.

Commendations were awarded to Brandon Di Bartolo (Gilroy Santa Maria College) for *Time to Be*, and Shannon Abel (Gordonvale SHS) for *Beautiful*. Di Bartolo was praised by the judges for his visuals and the music which he wrote and performed himself in his rant against the constraints

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of time. Abel's film about obsession with the packaging over the importance of inner beauty was commended for her considered cinematography.

Danny Carroll's (Gilroy Santa Maria College) *Stanley Jones* was a tongue-in-cheek interview with a young stalker who is obsessed with the mayor of Ingham, Pino Giandomenico. The unlikely premise just made it funnier, even if some of the jokes were a little cliché.

*Foreign Land* by Danielle Miller (Ryan Catholic College), a mystery about the aftermath of a fatal accident, is a story with potential, but needed further development, as parts of the narrative were too obscure.

The shortest film was a slick and engaging clay-mation monster battle by Peggy Wakelin-Snoad of Pimlico SHS. *Imagination* deserves to be longer, although its length is understandable considering the painstaking production process of this type of stop-motion animation.

Justin Hartwell's *Rustbucket 2.0*, the winner of the Open section, is the follow up to his original *Rustbucket*, which I haven't seen, but the second film doesn't require the viewer to have seen the first. Solid production values and fun special effects and sound effects underpin the schlock-horror action of a driverless demon Mazda hunting down a guy on a farm bike, with an ending which leaves the way open for another sequel.

Two other Open entries drew on the horror genre, but straight horror is difficult to pull off effectively, and both, for different reasons, needed tighter writing.

*Picture Perfect*, Matthew Gianoulis' tale of a model's revenge, was commended by the judges for its cinematography, handled flashback scenes effectively, and exploited its locations very well. The cast looked great, but the dialogue was stilted and the interaction between characters felt contrived.

*Trepidation* by Jared Sager appears to pay homage to *Blair Witch Project*, but



Rebecca Rymer, *I'll kill her*, 2009, Video still, Courtesy of eMerge Media Space

may have worked better as a spoof. With the combination of bouncy, hand-held camerawork, poor sound quality, buckets of fake blood, little apparent storyline, and improvised (?) dialogue consisting mainly of 'dude' and 'fuck',

it looks like some friends went bush to get drunk, filmed some video as an afterthought, and took the resulting footage way too seriously. To create tension in horror, empathy must be established with the characters, but in this case I just wanted them to die quickly so the film would reach its (unresolved) ending.

Annaliese Ciel's mother and daughter adoption reunion story seems perhaps too close to it's creator's life for her to stand back and see

how the story could have best been served. The potentially great story needed to be told a little less obviously, and to avoid lapsing into sentimentality and overacting. The contrast between the soft-spoken English mother's voice and the north Queensland accent of the daughter is grating at times, and I'm not

entirely sure, but they appear to be playing themselves, so the emotion appears real but oddly contrived at the same time, making the audience a little uncomfortable. As an animation, the story would fly.

The inaugural *Northern Lights* short film festival had a relatively short lead-up time, which could help explain why some of the entries seem under-baked, or of uneven quality.

Certainly there was some great skill and an abundance of ideas evident, which augurs well for next year's event.

*Journey of the light explorer - frozen deep* by Madeline Challender



## WATCH YOUR STEP

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5 December 2009 - 21 February 2010

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Miss Saigon, Townsville Civic Theatre, 2009, Photograph courtesy of NQOMT

## miss saigon soars



BY BRIAN EDMOND

The opening night of the North Queensland Opera and Music Theatre (NQOMT) production of *Miss Saigon* was a terrific performance. With a cast of over 50, including an offstage choir—as well as an orchestra (not to mention the backstage crew)—this was a huge show in every sense of the word.

Set against the background of the turmoil of

the end of the Vietnam War, individuals—people like you and I—are doing their best to survive; they're falling in love, are having sex and scamming (although not necessarily all at the same time).

We meet The Engineer, a sleazy nightclub owner in Saigon who is exhorting his 'dancers' to give the American GI's a great time (and part them from as many dollar bills as possible) when Kim, a young, innocent girl from the country joins his act. Although

inexperienced and reluctant, she makes an unforgettable impression on Chris, a marine, whose buddy John, a fellow marine, 'buys' Kim for Chris. However, Kim and Chris transcend their sordid introduction and fall in love in just one night.

Kim makes it to the US Embassy as Saigon is about to be overrun, but the invading North Vietnamese and American ineptitude conspire against Kim and Chris staying together. Kim fails to make it out.



Three years later Chris—believing Kim is dead—has married an American woman—Ellen. Kim, in the meantime, has given birth to Tam, Chris' son. Thuy—the man to whom Kim was originally betrothed when she was a child—tries to 'claim' Kim but she resists and, when Tam is threatened, she shoots Thuy. With The Engineer's help they escape to Bangkok.

John (who has joined an agency that helps illegitimate children of US soldiers from the Vietnam War) tells Chris that Kim has made it to Bangkok, and that she also has Chris' son with her.

Chris and Ellen travel to Bangkok but Ellen meets Kim in their hotel room. Kim realises that, despite her waiting for Chris, he has married. In desperation she urges Ellen to take Tam with her and Chris back to the United States but Ellen refuses. After Ellen tells Chris what has transpired they agree to try to persuade Kim to stay in Bangkok where Chris and Ellen will financially support Kim and Tam.

Kim realises she has only one choice if she is to ensure Tam's future in America— and she takes it—shooting herself as Chris, Ellen and John arrive. Chris is left with Kim dead in his arms, wondering what could have been.

So, what of the performances in this emotional roller-coaster?

Although D'Arcy Mullamphy as The Engineer was initially a little restrained, he really hit the straps early in the first Act and from then on was excellent as the Eurasian con-artist desperate to get his share of the American Dream. He was particularly good in *If You Want to Die in Bed*.

The ensemble worked well together, playing multiple roles and skilfully executing the varied and engaging choreography of Jane Pirani. Some of the 'bit parts' were not quite as convincing as they might have been, but those performers will be better placed next time having had the benefit of their *Miss Saigon* experience, and it is great to see them being given this opportunity.

The orchestra was strong and well led by Orchestral Director Ryan Christoffersen, with a good balance between it and the singers.

John (Peter Brett) really came into his own in the evocative *Bui Doi* and, despite some technical sound problems, he and the vocal choir pulled off a great number. Incidentally, the vocal choir were very good throughout the show, adding depth and colour to all songs they were part of.

Thuy (Marcus Skeggs) was technically vocally impressive but greater emotional connection to what he is singing would be welcome.

Chris (Kelly Stone) was not as vocally strong as Kim (Elissa Jenkins); nonetheless, he and Elissa achieved something critical to the success of this production, namely, if you don't 'buy' the relationship between Chris and Kim the show doesn't get off the ground. Not only did their relationship get into the air—it soared.

Key highlights for me included any songs involving Kim and Ellen (Sharon Ransom)—particularly, *I Still Believe* and *Room 317*. Special mention is also deserving for Tam (played by Marko Steven Regalo on opening night) who, despite being regularly picked up, cuddled, threatened and sung to, was

engaging and believable as Kim's son. The Bangkok scene worked well and kudos for creating a 'real' helicopter, which was very effective.

However, it was the stunning performance of Kim (Elissa Jenkins) that really made this production special. Elissa was vocally strong technically, but it was her courage in committing unreservedly to every moment that meant it was impossible not to be emotionally engaged by her.

Congratulations are due to director Bill Munro and his production team. If you missed *Miss Saigon*, you missed a beauty. If NQOMT's next production is half as good, it will be well worth seeing!

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Henry V, Photographed by Chrissy Maguire

## henry v



BY BRIAN EDMOND

Tropic Sun Theatre, Queens Gardens

Although occasionally fighting to be heard over the nearby AFL umpires' whistles and the screeching of bats, this production of *Henry V*, presented by Tropic Sun Theatre, was not just a performance – but an event! With a raked seating bank, in front of which were tables and chairs for those who have booked for dinner during the show, the show was performed under the trees (and stars).

Even though there was a range of experience and skills, with some professional actors

and other community actors, this production had a strong ensemble. This was not stuffy 'art' but rougher and more celebratory for audience and cast alike. With food and drink readily available there was a warm anticipation as the show began.

Eschewing the traditional role of *Chorus* we see the Countess of Warwick (an elegant Terri Brabon, also the director) introducing the 'story' of *Henry V* to cheer up crippled Prince Richard (later Richard III) and his young cousins. While this worked quite well throughout the show it was not as effective as it might have been due to the practicalities of having to bring the children on and off for

each of their scenes. I would have liked to have seen them as a permanent presence perhaps in a tree or on a platform overlooking the whole 'story' below, which would have given greater coherence to this device.

Henry V (Brendan O'Connor) seeks counsel from the Archbishop of Canterbury (Syd Brisbane) as to whether England has a legal claim to France. He is advised that England does have such a claim and Henry resolves immediately to attack France. Henry then admits the French Ambassador and is presented with a 'treasure' of tennis balls and a very clear message from The Dauphin (also played by a fiery Syd Brisbane) that



Henry should keep his hands off France. Henry makes it plain that he will take what is his and France will not be laughing when he is done.

While we 'get' the testosterone-fuelled drive to war, was Henry manipulated by his advisers into declaring war? Was he really insulted by the gift of tennis balls? For me this was not clear. In the context of this production being performed in Townsville, a garrison city, with our young men being sent to (and dying in) war, the answers to these questions could have been clearer. Despite some minor references, this production, for me, had no particular attitude to the waste of war or justification for war.

The lower class English characters were effective, with Pistol (John Goodson), Bardolph (Andrew Higgins), Mistress Quickly (Kellie Esling) and Boy (Adin Whitton) working well together. The decadent and arrogant French Court was also well realised in contrast to the earthy English. Not quite so convincing were the soldiers from the

different parts of the British Isles. This appeared to be mainly due to their text being less easily accessible for a modern audience.

The female performances were very strong, including Kellie Esling as Queen Isabelle of France, and Kate Hooper as Alice in a very assured performance (and also as the French soldier Monsieur Le Fer). Paul Ransom as the Duke of Exeter had good presence; and Jeremy Cheetham was very convincing as the French herald Montjoy.

Terri Brabon and her production team have done a very good job. The pace was tight and the verse and prose was clearly well understood by every cast member, making our comprehension so much easier. The sound design was very film-score-like and, although at times a little heavy-handed, emphasised key moments very well. The battle scenes were exciting—particularly the Archers—with terrific use of backlighting and shadows (requiring precise coordination from all involved) and the reference to the future King Richard III was also a nice touch.

The stand-out performance without doubt was Brendan O'Connor as Henry V. He was engaging and believable as a king and as a soldier. Two of his 'big' speeches—'Saint Crispin's day' and 'Once more unto the breach'—were excellent, with the latter generating so much enthusiasm that not only did the soldiers on stage cheer but so did the woman in front of me.

However, O'Connor was particularly at ease in his scene in which he woos Princess Katherine of France (a sweet Cara Doolan), which was funny and tender at the same time due to his awkwardness in making small talk with the ladies while desperately wanting to impress her.

There was a lot to like about this production and for a fun night out I recommend it. I also recommend booking for dinner—the meals looked great.

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